

'All Shook Up' captures essence of Elvis Presley

Andy Metzger, News Journal correspondent 11:16 a.m. CDT June 27, 2014



(Photo: News Journal file)

This is the 11th year the University of Alabama's SummerTide Theatre has presented a musical at the George C. Meyer Performing Arts Center in Gulf Shores, Ala. I've had the pleasure of reviewing several of the previous shows presented as part of this program, and I've always been impressed by the exceptional quality.

This year's production is "All Shook Up," and it was great to see the quality has not wavered as the student cast from the University of Alabama's Department of Theatre and Dance scores high marks in all areas. Theatergoers have through Fourth of July to see a show.

"All Shook Up" is all about performing songs by Elvis Presley. The story features a "roustabout" drifter named Chad — the obvious Elvis figure — who arrives in a small town in the throes of moralistic repression back in the '50s. The set, costumes and props all capture the flavor of that bygone era.

I won't even start to detail the various interconnected romantic entanglements that engulf the eight characters we meet in "All Shook Up." Suffice it to say, the story is largely a framework within which the cast members have frequent opportunities to break into song. This musical is clever, frequently funny and full of lively dance choreography.

I also want to credit this year's SummerTide director, Stacy Alley, for including a pair of interracial relationships in the show's romantic mix. One of them involves Dean, a character played by Pensacolian Benjamin Haupt, who is a junior at the University of Alabama. Dean is in love with Lorraine, portrayed by Sandra Gates, and they are charming together on stage. It's also nice to see how Haupt's voice and acting skills have continued to develop from his days of performing in Pensacola productions.

Haupt and Gates were especially engaging on their rendition of "It's Now or Never."

Kilian Afzalirad completely nails the Elvis persona as Chad. He has the look, the swagger and that '50s era crooner's voice. His best moment and, in my opinion, the best number in the show, occurs when Afzalirad sings the lead vocals in a knockout good rendering of "C'mon Everybody."

Rachel Barber, who plays Sylvia, has the best voice in the cast. She conjures up some Aretha Franklin magic, especially on her soaring solo, "There's Always Me."

Highest marks for comic timing go to Will Erwin, who plays a nerdy wannabe named Dennis; and to Brianna Heller, who plays Sandra, the beautiful, intellectual caretaker of the town's museum who transforms into a smoldering volcano of repressed passion.

I also have to mention Kelly Kohlman, who plays Natalie and Ed. Natalie is a tomboy of a girl who is so smitten with Chad that she disguises herself as "Ed" so she can be around him as his sidekick. This leads to many funny moments, but I also liked the sincerity Kohlman injects into her role. We really feel for Natalie and Kohlman's rendering of "Love Me Tender" is my favorite quiet musical moment in the show.

Bill Martin plays Jim — Sylvia's eventual love interest in the production's other interracial relationship — and he does a good job of portraying a middle-aged widower trying to find his way to a new life.

Assisting Alley are musical director/pianist Terry Moore, stage manager Karen Baker, technical director Abigail Gandy, scenic designer Andy Fitch, lighting and sound designer William Teague, costume designer Donna Meester and drummer Zachary Swanner.

Want to GO?

- **WHAT:** "All Shook Up."
- **WHEN:** 8 p.m. today through Sunday and Tuesday through July 4.

- **WHERE:** George C. Meyer Performing Arts Center, 2022 W. Second St., Gulf Shores, Ala.
- **TICKETS:** \$20; \$15 for children ages 12 and younger.
- **DETAILS:** 251-968-6721 or visit www.summertime.org.

Read or Share this story: <http://on.pnj.com/1lwxm5w>

PENSACOLA News Journal

A GANNETT COMPANY